

POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY ENVIRONMENT AND "PROSPEROUS SCHOOLS" FOR CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISORDERS

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Abstract

The theoretical frame of this paper was grounded in positive psychology programs and social ecology theory. The main aim of the first part of the study was to identify the discriminatory attitudes of the students towards disabled people. After we gain results from the first part of the study, based on School-wide Positive Behavior Support project, we modified it and created psycho-educative workshops for secondary school students and for students at the Faculty of Educational Science. We believe that building positive psychology environment and "flourishing schools" will be one of the prospective in order to create an inclusive educational environment.

Key words: equal access, children and adolescents, disabilities, positive psychology.

1.INTRODUCTION

The term 'person with disability' may refer to many different conditions: a disability may be physical, intellectual, sensory or psycho-social, permanent or temporary, and result from illness, injury or genetics. People with disabilities have the same human rights as all other people. From some reasons they often face social, legal and practical barriers in claiming their human rights on an equal basis with others. These reasons usually stem from misperceptions and negative attitudes toward disability itself. Many people often show up with their misperception and misunderstanding and negative attitudes toward disability itself. In their misperception constructs, people with disabilities are `sick` or `broken` and require fixing or healing. Instead, a positive attitude regards disability as a natural part of human diversity that should be approached with reasonable accommodation, which is any measure designed to promote full participation and access, and to empower a person to act on his or her own behalf. This positive approach suggest that society has a responsibility to accommodate the person with disabilities.

In this paper, we discuss the need for pre-service teachers, service teachers and students to raise awareness against discrimination toward disabled children and

adolescents. They should enter the classroom with the disposition to focus on individual strengths and to understand how the diversity of students' abilities and backgrounds contributes to the subjective well-being of the student population (Miloseva & Marelja, 2009). The theoretical frame was grounded in positive psychology programs and social ecology theory (Lewis, & Mitchell, 2012).

Today, Positive psychology programs address a broad range of academic and social behavioural challenges and has transformed from a singular focus on individual case planning to systems level implementation especially involving school-wide and community issues (Sugai & Horner, 2002). School-wide Positive Behaviour Support project is a systems approach for establishing the social culture and individualized behavioral supports needed for schools to be effective learning environments for all students, including disabled children and adolescents (Lewis & Mitchell, 2012).

We believe that building positive psychology environment and "flourishing schools" will be one of the prospective ways in order to create inclusive education environment. Although definitions of high quality teaching vary, considerably a good teacher capitalizes on the strength of each student and on the strength of social environment. Yet, novice teachers struggle to identify all students' abilities and social support. Many teachers describe inclusion practices as just another obstacle encountered in the classroom. We seek to identify ways of changing this burden of inclusion mindset to a welcoming/enriching notion align with positive psychology concepts.

It is important to understand how the social environment affects child well-being in order to improve health outcomes for children.

According to Lopez and Snyder (2005), the following concepts are key to recognizing how children's physical and mental health is influenced by social factors, how the people and conditions in children's environments support their development, and how children's vulnerabilities to poor mental health outcomes can be reduced by promoting positive emotional and behavioral health:

- The *social ecological model* of human development and the many factors influencing development;
- *Resilience* and its importance to children's emotional and behavioral health;
- How strengthening *protective factors* and reducing *risk factors* can influence children's emotional and behavioral health.

The social ecological model helps us understand how individuals and their social environments are interrelated. The defining feature of the social ecological model of human development is the growth and change that occurs as a result of interactions between individuals and environmental influences, which include the family, school, peers, neighborhood, community, and nation (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, according to Berk, 2013). The social ecological model is often illustrated as a series of circles within circles, each influencing an individual's development to varying degrees (at the interpersonal level, formal and informal social network and support systems-including family, workgroup, and peer networks; institutional and organizational factors; community factors; public policy influences) (Santrock, 2011).

2.METHODOLOGY

Service-learning provides thoughtfully organized experiences that integrate students' academic learning with service that meets actual community needs. Service and learning are joined in many ways that complement and enhance each other. The *main aim of the first part of the study* was to identify attitudes of students for discrimination towards disabled people and the *aim of the second part* was to implement some psycho-educative workshops in order to raise awareness against this kind of discrimination.

3.RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

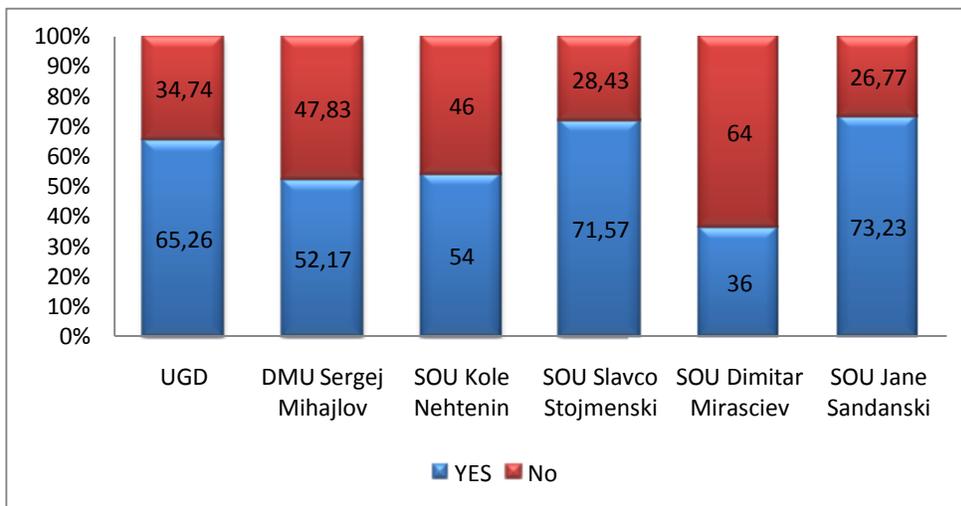
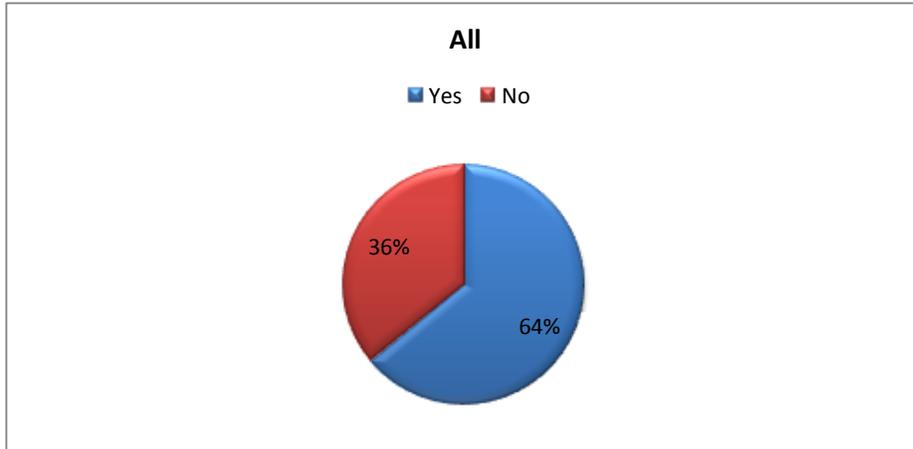
1 part of the study

In order to identify attitudes of students for discrimination towards disabled people we used service learning methodology. In collaboration and support with local community Stip, we conduct research in five secondary schools and at the Goce Delcev University, Stip.

Analysis and results of filled questioner are presented below.

3.1.Does any kind of separation exist within the society you study and live in?

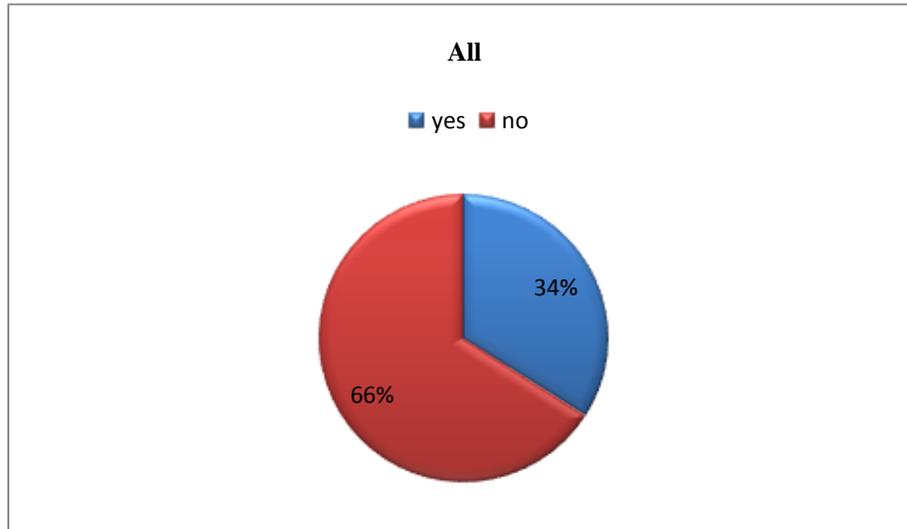
School	Yes	No	Questioned
SOU "Jane Sandanski"	145	53	198
SOU"Dimitar Mirasciev"	18	32	50
SOU"Slavco Stojmenski"	141	56	197
SOU "Kole Nehtenin"	108	92	200
DMU"Sergej Mihajlov"	24	22	46
UGD "Goce Delcev"	139	74	213
All	575	329	904



3.2. Have you ever felt different than the others or that you haven't belong to that group? (any kind of group; describe if you ever found yourself in that kind of situation)

School	Yes	No	Questioned
SOU "Jane Sandanski"	68	130	198
SOU "Dimitar Mirasciev"	6	44	50
SOU "Slavco Stojmenski"	79	113	192
SOU "Kole Nehtenin"	66	134	200
DMU "Sergej Mihajlov"	8	38	46

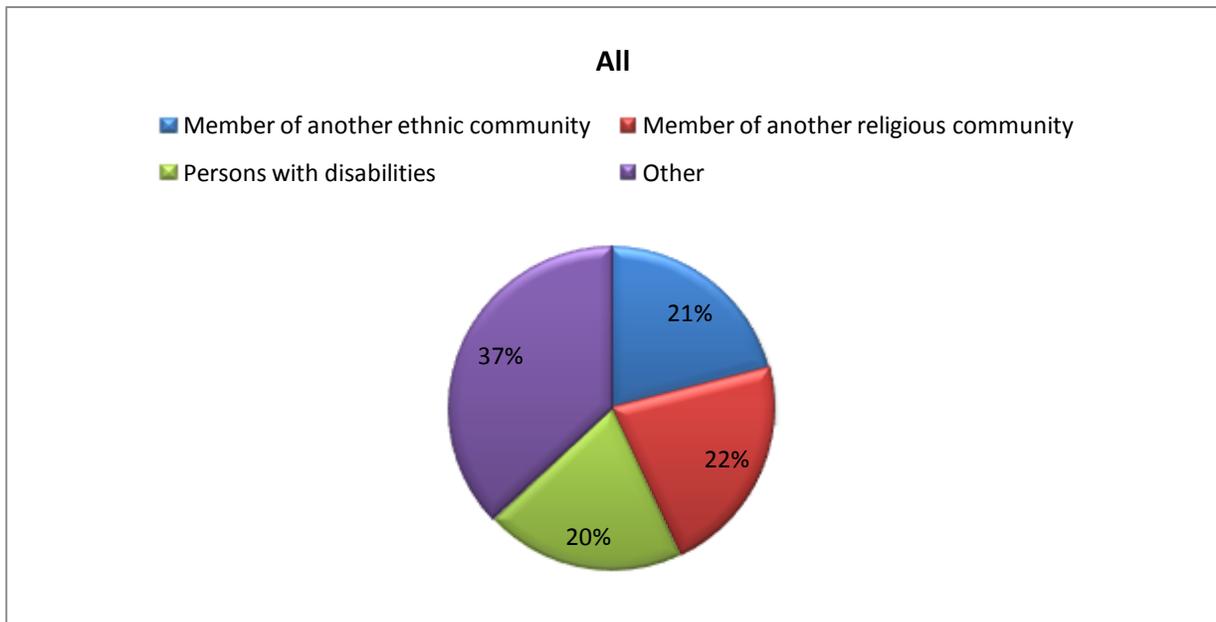
UGD Delcev”	“Goce	82	131	213
All		309	590	899

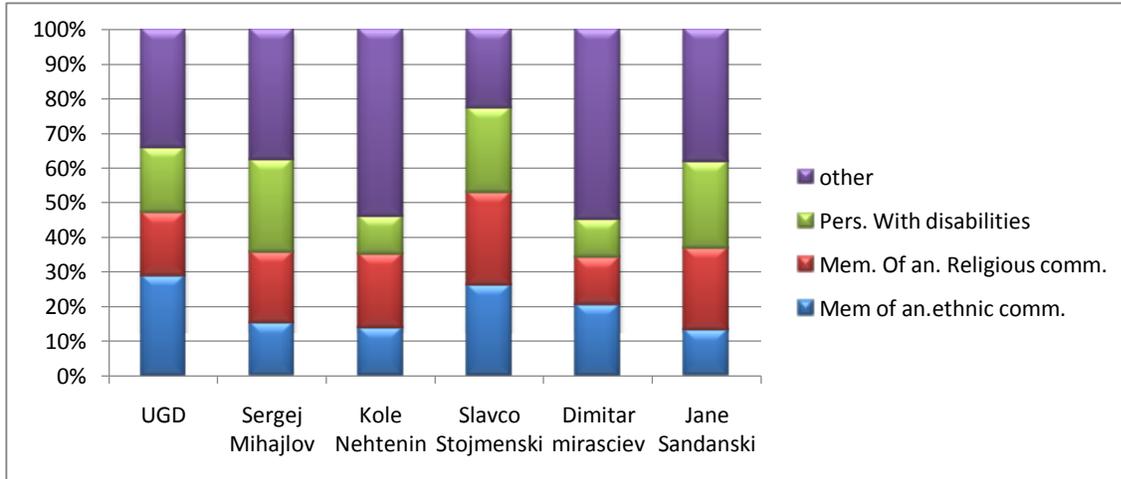


3.3. Have you recognized different behavior towards:

School	Member of another ethnic community	Member of another religious community	Persons with disabilities	Other	Questioned
SOU “Jane Sandanski”	29	53	55	85	222
SOU “Dimitar	11	7	6	29	53

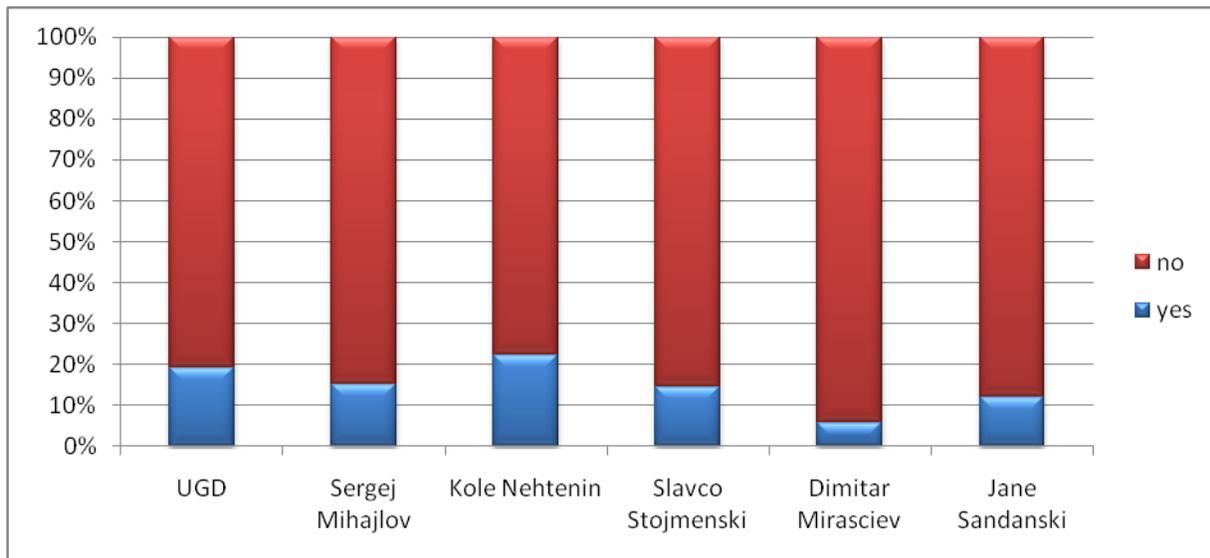
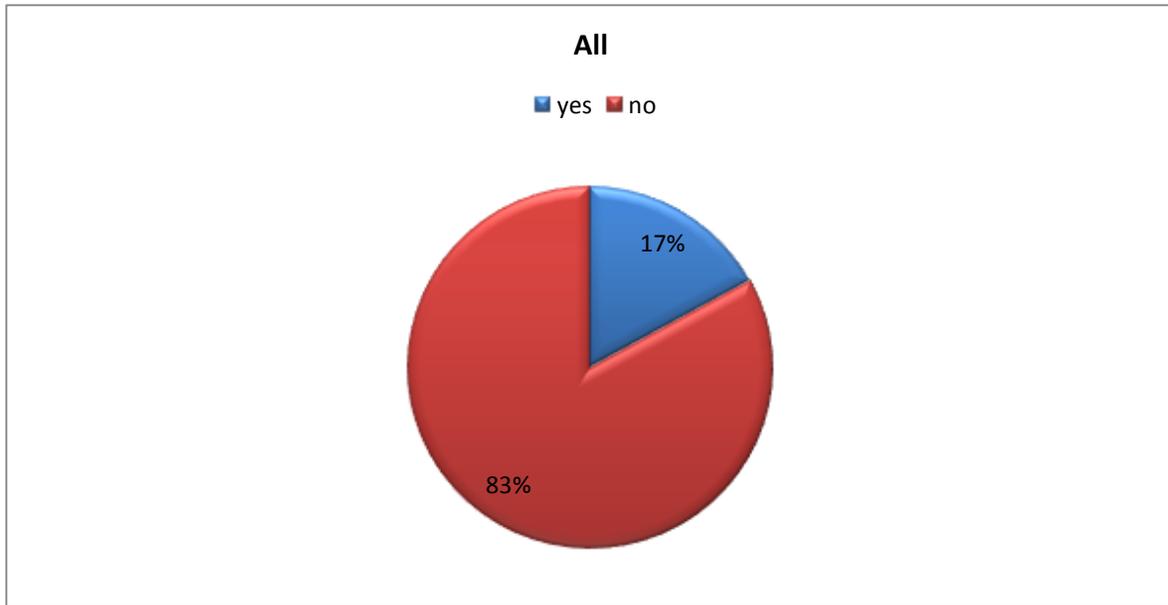
Mirasciev”					
SOU “ Slavco Stojmenski”	61	63	57	53	234
SOU “Kole Nehtenin”	30	47	25	118	220
DMU “Sergej Mihajlov”	8	11	14	20	53
UGD “Goce Delcev”	80	49	53	93	275
All	219	230	210	398	1057





3.4. Have you ever experienced different behavior towards somebody within the group just because she/he is different than the others?

School	Yes	No	Questioned
SOU "Jane Sandanski"	24	174	198
SOU "Dimitar Mirasciev"	3	47	50
SOU "Slavco Stojmenski"	29	168	197
SOU "Kole Nehtenin"	45	155	200
DMU "Sergej Mihajlov"	7	39	46
UGD "Goce Delcev"	43	180	223
All	151	763	914



II part of the study

After we gain results from the first part of the study, we conducted *second part of the study*.

Based on School-wide Positive Behaviour Support project, we modified and created psycho educative workshops for secondary school students and for students at Faculty of Educational Science. School-wide Positive Behaviour Support project (Allen & Hill, 2011) is a systems approach for establishing the social culture and individualized behavioral supports needed for schools to be effective learning environments for all students, including those with disabilities.

Psycho educative workshops were implemented during the summer/winter semester, academic 2011/2012 and 2012/2013 in the frame of elective subjects : Social

psychology and Positive psychology at the Faculty of Educational Science, Goce Delcev University, Stip; and during the project classes in secondary schools: Jane Sandanski, Dimitar Mirasciev, Slavco Stojmenski, Kole Nehtenin, Sergej Mihajlov, Stip.

The main aim of our activities was to:

- describe discrimination toward disabled people;
- raise awareness of students, teachers, pre-service teachers, parents, local community, for equal access through formal and informal learning for children and adolescents with disabilities;
- promote equality of opportunity for disabled people, taking steps to take account of disabled people's disabilities;
- promote positive attitudes to disabled people; and
- encourage disabled people to participate in public life;
- describe activities that students can engage in to reflect on their service in community, and to make connections between their service and what they learned.

They were focused on five positive psychology concepts:(a) hope; (b) gratitude; (c) use of strengths; (d) positive social relationships; (e) pleasure, engagement, and meaning orientations to happiness.

4.CONCLUSION

According to the student's opinion, based on results in this survey, we can conclude that there are elements of separation in society in which students live and study (64%); students have not felt different than the others or that they haven't belong to that group (66%); they have recognized different behavior towards people with disabilities (20%); but personally, they have never experienced different behaviour toward somebody on base of differences (83%). We agree that psycho-educative workshops that we conducted could be effective way to raise awareness against discrimination toward people with disabilities. Through psycho-educative workshops we emphasized importance of service learning and involvement of community in creation of equal access for children and adolescent with disabilities.

We hope that we somehow contribute to raise voice for our cause - ensuring equal rights through service learning for the persons with disabilities.

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